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UNCLAS NIAMEY 000838

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SUBJECT: Journalist Tiemogo Released from Prison

Ref: a) Niamey 000567, b) Niamey 00619

¶1. (U) Summary: Authorities released journalist Abdoulaye Tiemogo of the weekly independent newspaper "Le Canard Dechaine" from prison on October 26 after accepting an appeal to commute his sentence. Held in prison since August 1, officials had accused Tiemogo of having "discredited a judicial decision" by publically criticizing an arrest warrant issued against former Prime Minister Hama Amadou. Meanwhile, Niger dropped nine spots in the recent Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index to 139, the worst ranking in West Africa. End summary.

¶2. (U) Authorities released Abdoulaye Tiemogo, Director of Publications of the independent weekly newspaper "Le Canard Dechaine," on October 26 after more than two months in prison. Security forces detained Tiemogo along with seven other independent journalists on August 1, just before the August 4 referendum to consider the adoption of a new constitution to expand and extend the President's authority. The judiciary charged Tiemogo with "discrediting a judicial decision" for his statements on the private television channel Dounia criticizing the issuance of an arrest warrant for former Prime Minister Hama Amadou (ref A). On August 18, a court convicted and sentenced him to three months' imprisonment, which he appealed.

¶3. (U) Post issued a press statement on August 17 calling for the release of Tiemogo and for the return to respect for the rule of law and the freedom of the press. Independent media provided wide and positive coverage for the statement (ref B).

¶4. (SBU) After contracting acute malaria, authorities moved Tiemogo to a Niamey hospital for treatment on August 23. On August 31, National Intervention and Security Forces (FNIS) transferred Tiemogo abruptly and against the advice of his physician to a remote prison in Ouallam, 100 km north of Niamey. According to the president of the local Network of Journalists for Human Rights, Abdourahamane Ousmane, this was done deliberately to isolate Tiemogo, consequently putting his health at risk. (Note: Ousmane attended the Sept. 26 - Oct. 16, 2009 IVLP Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists. End note.) Post talked with Tiemogo after his release, who said his health had recovered.

¶5. (U) On October 26, the Niamey Court of Appeal ordered the Tiemogo's release after reducing his prison term from three months to two, according to President Boubacar Diallo with the Nigerien Association for Independent Press Editors (ANEPI).

¶6. (U) Note: In the 2009 Press Freedom Index published by Reporters without Borders on October 20, Niger dropped nine places from last year's report to 139 out of 175 countries worldwide, the worst ranking in West Africa. End note.

